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1937	Mission to determine the trijunction point of the frontiers of French Guiana-Brazil-Surinam.
1939	Declaration of war.
1944-45	Not a precise point of reference. The Boni confuse the liberation of the territory with the end of the war.
1948	First I.G.N. mission.
1949	Mr. Aubert de la Rüe's mission; second I.G.N. mission.
1952	Third I.G.N. mission. /blank page/ /63/

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

571 The social institutions of the Refugee Blacks diverge noticeably from those of the African peoples from whom they issued. [561] They do not include age grades, men's societies, or initiation; [575] marriage involves neither a contract between kin groups nor [881] "dowry." [583]

571 626 In a general way these societies founded by rebel slaves who had retained an extreme horror of all oppression were organized so as not to have any material constraint weigh upon the individual. [791] Their institutions are entirely founded on the idea of protection against suprahuman perils; the individual remains perfectly free, and he adheres /to these institutions/ only in proportion as he is conscious of these perils. [156] The custom of the Refugee Blacks, devoid of any means of material coercion, tends to develop within the individual the feeling that he is constantly threatened.

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591 626 156 [81] 761 that he can protect himself only by submitting to the law of the group. In this doubtless must be seen the deep reason for the importance attached to death and mourning, events around which is centered the activity of the usual societies and which entail a veritable mobilization.

626 991 It would be very difficult to condense the custom of the Refugee Blacks into a rigorous code. If one wished to do it, one would have to write as Article 1: "The living will conform to the will of the gods and the ancestors as it is expressed through the mouths of those possessed and by the movements of the bearers of the dead."

613 619 Each one of the tribes of the Refugee Blacks is formed of a certain number of matrilineages.

There is no limit on the number of these lineages, and it can be asserted that if any lineage whatever, detached from another tribe, asks to live in the midst of the Boni, it will be welcomed. From the first generation the children consider themselves as Boni.

In this regard one can cite the example of the Awara Bakka 3 lineage and that of the small lineage founded in Boniville by a Djuka woman, wife of Grand Man Ochi. All her descendants consider themselves Boni. /64/

[829] [643] But only the great lineages which constituted the tribe at its origin are social units recognized by the grand man, and only their heads are called to be members of the council.

128 We shall study first the interior functioning of the lineage, then the institutions going beyond the framework of the lineages.

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577 691 641 The morality of the Refugee Blacks knows in effect only obligations of a social and religious order. As for everything concerning material life, each one has the absolute right, one could even say the duty, to act as he sees fit, insofar as he does not wrong anyone else.

643 671 64 [756] If the grand man gave an order obliging someone to act against his own interest, for example if he wished to lower arbitrarily the price of boats, this order would be lawfully void. If the grand man has very great personal influence, he can persuade the Boni that it is to their interest to obey such a prescription, but in no case can his command have the effect of imposing by force an arbitrary order foreign to the social and religious tradition; the present grand man is weak in character to boot, sensitive to the influence of the Creoles and very little given to exerting any authority.

643 771 In reality, the office of grand man is above all religious. The grand man centralizes, if one may say so, the struggle against evil forces and watches ceaselessly over the welfare of the collectivity.

643 764 When a man dies, his near relatives come to report on the questioning of the yɔrka. Burial cannot take place until the grand man has made sure that all the prescriptions have been filled. People come to report to him again after the burial so that he can be sure that no suprahuman danger remains.

643 775 [782] The grand man has special power over the yɔrka (spirits) of the dead, which the beliefs of the Refugee Blacks place on a level intermediate between the human and the divine. When one of these yɔrka exerts against a lineage a vengeance (kunu) whose malignity goes beyond habitual bounds, the grand man beseeches it to stop; they allege that things go back to normal, at least for a time.

This power attributed to the grand man invests him, in the eyes of the Boni, with a suprahuman character. It is the very foundation of his political power.

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643 778 241 The grand man acts as land head for the whole of the tribe. It is he who has the care of the sanctuary of mama gɔ̃ and who prays each year in the presence of a large gathering of people for the fertility of the soil.

643 793 796 782 The grand man is the priest of Odun, divinity whom the Boni regard as avenger of offenses against moral and religious law; by virtue of this, he alone is qualified to administer the oath against wiʃi (sorcery) and to implore the mercy of Odun toward those who have gone against his laws by fighting with arms.

643 156 In his religious functions this usually weak and unobtrusive man acts with sovereign authority and assurance, and we have several times seen people tremble before him.

643 681 [623] If someone has seriously transgressed the customary laws, or if he has stolen, committed adultery, given blows, poured forth serious insults or curses, the grand man inflicts on him punishment proportional to the gravity of the offense, such as making planks, /73/ a boat, pounding rice (if it is a woman). The product of the punishment is acquired by the grand man, as are the fines in money which he imposes in less serious cases.

643 685 For example in October, 1952, two adolescents of Boniville, Awétipay and Adyuka, were surprised while they were trying to break into an inhabited house; the grand man sentenced them forthwith to three days of forced labor, in the course of which he made them clean the approaches to the village and collect for his benefit wood for heating.

643 689 462 He can also punish disobedient or disrespectful young men by making them do work reserved for women, such as weeding the approaches to the village and the removal of dog droppings.

643 681 The grand man can confine a man to Boni villages by forbidding him to go beyond l'Enfant Perdu to the north and Kormotibo to the south; that is called sitafu sama (sitafu = captive). The man concerned, deprived of means of earning his living, thus becomes dependent on his family until he makes honorable amends.

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868 [501] To this traditional knowledge, which remains indispensable, has been added for the past several years substantial knowledge of mechanics, because the use of outboard motors is becoming more and more common; this knowledge is transmitted in empirical fashion as it has been acquired. It must be recorded that the motors go and that they are well kept up.

86 The system of education employed by the Refugee Blacks is surely effective; their children are excessively turbulent and very difficult when they are in a group. When they are divided up individually in the midst of adults, they are placed under the best conditions for learning the techniques and traditions of their group.

429 513 The person charged with the education of a child does not willingly entrust him to another and takes him along whenever he moves. However, by concern for propriety, the woman guardian sends the children she is raising to sleep in other houses on the days when her husband comes to visit her. Boys go to sleep at the home of a brother, an uncle, a comrade; the same for girls who have not yet reached puberty; but it is not the same for girls who have reached puberty; they are subjected to strict supervision.

648 871 156 This is one of the reasons why the Boni find it repugnant to put their children in school (French school of Maripasoula, Surinam school of Kotika). Without wishing to tackle here this sad problem to its fullest extent, we must state that this teaching, entirely inappropriate and dispensed by teachers who look down on the Refugee Blacks, has results nearly similar to those observed generally in Africa, the main one being to make the children strangers to their own families and misfits in their own country. There is practically no example of a case where the Boni nation has benefited from having one of its children go to school: if the child succeeds, he leaves for Paramaribo and never comes back again. If he fails, he then has much more

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C48 871 •156 difficulty in learning the techniques of his group, for the years when the mind is most pliant have been lost in this regard; as for the knowledge acquired at school, it is so foreign to the life of the Refugee Blacks that at the end of a few years none of it remains except vague smatterings.

861 In general, the process of education employed among the Refugee Blacks is imitation of the adult. A child is rarely given a lesson as such. He sees something done, he tries on his own 868 initiative, and little by little he learns. For example, /133/ he sees his guardian make a boat; he is simply asked to go and get dry palm branches and to take away the chips; he hears the adults discuss the job as it goes on. At about the age of 12 or 13 he tries to make a first boat for himself with the help of an older comrade. He progressively acquires knowledge of this technique.

561 462 Boys begin to take part in farm work from the age of six or seven, principally weeding and planting. At about ten or eleven they begin to handle the machete and help to cut through the bush; at about 12 they begin to handle the axe and learn to fell trees. At 14 or 15 they begin to make small boats. An adolescent of 16 or 17 is in general capable of cutting a clearing for his mother or sister.

429 86 Most often the guardian takes his role very seriously, giving his main attention to teaching the child all that is necessary. If it is a woman, she asks her brothers to teach the techniques of boating and building.

866 461 434 [291] The principle is to develop very early a sense of responsibility in the child by making it progressively necessary for him to earn his living. The guardian does not furnish pocket money, and with the exception of a hammock every other year, no manufactured objects (children under 11-12 years not being clothed, he has almost no expenses for clothing). But he gives the child progressively chances to earn money by his work. From ten years on, the child begins to render some services: for example for the construction of a boat, he helps transport the dry palm branches intended for the burning. If the boat is being

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156 The Boni woman, poor in emotional feelings, and jealous of her independence with respect to men, puts her pride into subsisting by her own efforts.

178 [156] The young women, even the ones with the freest habits, stay firmly attached to their village, to their plantings, and to the mode of life they received from their grandmothers. In fact, because of its structure and customs, the society of the Refugee Blacks has much less likelihood of suffering from the poisons spread by modern life than the patrilineal societies of Black Africa.

761 /159/ Death; Burial Rites

Death is for the Refugee Blacks an event of extreme gravity.

775 In order to ward off danger and permit the yɔrka of the dead person to take its place among the ancestors, the unstinting cooperation of everyone is required.

764 765 181 [621] [619] The ceremonies which have to do with death and mourning are by far the most important ones in the day-to-day life of the Refugee Blacks; for each one they represent a very heavy material load which is accepted without recriminations. It is really a veritable mobilization, which takes place within the framework of the village and not of the lineage. The apparatus set into motion is independent of the lineage, for it must function in the same way for an outsider, Djuka or Saramaka, who dies during a trip.

764 868 767 Participation in the burial rites is for all an essential religious duty. From childhood the Boni are prepared for this task and become, some of them kisimã (coffin-makers), others ɔlɔmã (grave-diggers), some others wasimã (bathers of the dead).

767 467 Kisimã and ɔlɔmã. It can be said that in each village, ɔlɔmã and kisimã constitute customary societies, provided with an organization and wielding veritable powers for the duration of their work.

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628 614 784 787 156 769 778 The members of the Dipélu lineage did not believe a word of this affair, convinced that Kiboya, a proud and scheming woman, had pretended the gita to make herself interesting. Nevertheless, to bring back peace, they decided to go to Asisi and to ask pardon in front of the fraga tiki, pouring tafia, asking the ancestors not to take vengeance, the living being reconciled.

784 614 775 /227/ (Note that in this affair, the yɔrka manifests itself in a member of the lineage on which it exercises the kunu.)

784 614 613 Kunu of the Awara Bakka lineage. The Awara Bakka lineage does not form a unit with respect to the kunu, and the situation of its fractions is particularly interesting. This lineage includes:

--A principal fraction (Aw.B.1);

--A fraction whose kinship ties with the first are forgotten (Aw.B.2), whose position with respect to the kunu we have not been able to define.

--Finally, a group descended from Anèta, Djuka woman, wife of Pééyon † (Aw.B.1) settled in Asisi with her descendants in uterine line. We have called this group Aw.B.3. It has a separate kunu originating in the Djuka village of Tabiki where Anèta came from.

784 787 776 613 428 The Awara Bakka I, all living in Asisi village, had to our knowledge three kunu in 1957:

--One exercised by a Papa gadu god, borne up to 1957 by O Kuluba (Aw.B.1, D1). At her death in April, 1957, she bequeathed it, contrary to custom, to a person of another fraction, Summa (Aw.B.3). But the god did not ratify this legacy and, in January, 1958; it manifested itself in O Léna (Aw.B.1, F52), thus remaining in the same lineage;

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152 828 754 777 Jealousy. To speak of jealousy as a negative magic force is not to be false to the thought of the Refugee Blacks. They regard it as an attenuated force of wisi, capable of bringing misfortunes even if no sorcery has been formulated. Jealousy is very marked in their character, associated with an individualism verging on asocial tendencies. When somebody is accused of wisi, jealousy is the commonest explanation of the crimes attributed to him; it is thought for example that a man can be jealous of his brother's growing rich to the point of making him die; that a woman may be jealous of the beauty or health of her sister's children. Not laying themselves open to jealousy is the constant preoccupation of the Refugee Blacks; one observes it in daily behavior, for example in the greetings which they exchange on the river. They never say, "I am well," but: "I feel only fair." If they come back from hunting they say, "I found a little."

152 156 828 [182] [463] Examples are not lacking of people who avoid building a fine house or buying an outboard motor in order not to give cause for jealousy. This preoccupation has profound repercussions on the material life and the economy of the Refugee Blacks; it explains in particular the absence of specialized professions and trade among them.

[183] [571] Many aspects of the customary law of the Refugee Blacks have no other function than to exorcise, if one may say so, tendencies toward jealousy and selfishness which, if they were given free rein, would poison the life of the collectivity.

76 181 725 828 The rites of death and mourning, which we have shown to constitute the pivot of the social life of the Refugee Blacks, are entirely based on the idea of preserving the surviving spouse from the effect of the jealousy of the deceased.

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175 with their allies. The sites of
648 their villages, marked on Coudreau's
727 map (1888) are in immediate proximity
to those of former Oayana villages.

175 relations must have been created rapidly and in a very natural
648 fashion. The grand man of the Boni is in a way the suzerain of
[643] the Indian chiefs; this situation was not imposed by force; it results from the privileged situation of the Boni on the river, which until recent times obliged the Indians to deal through them in order to trade with the outside world.

Although the Boni took advantage of this situation in days gone by to impose arbitrary rates of exchange upon the Indians, this relation must not be imagined as the exploitation of con-
648 quered by conqueror. It is based on the absolute respect of each
829 group for the beliefs and social structure of the other, and an activity for each befitting its inclination. The proverb says:
[439] "To the Boni the river, to the Indians the forest." Thus it is that the Boni traditionally buy arrows from the Indians, while the latter buy paddles from them; the meaning of this symobl is perfectly understood by both.

648 Marriages between the two groups, without being for-
582 bidden, are regarded as contrary to custom (2).

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582 2. The marriage of Grand Man Awensay to an Indian woman about 1915 was inspired by complex motives. Toward the end of his life, Awensay could no longer stand the Boni, his imperious personality putting up badly with their individualism and their taste for discussion. He had established the Indian country a farming habitation in which he lived nearly all

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year; by taking an Indian woman as his wife he apparently sought to humiliate his subjects.

Awensay's children and grandchildren were all dead in 1957 except for two women, both sterile. There has been no other case of marriage between Boni and Indians.

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439 /294/ In practice, the basis for commercial exchanges is the following: the Indians furnish hammocks, and above all dogs trained for hunting, to which great value is attached. The Boni furnish boats. In days gone by they also brought imported objects, machetes, axes, and beads, but this form of trade has disappeared since the Indians have had the possibility of getting supplies from the Europeans.

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648 Several observers, coming after Coudreau (1890) and Grébert (1937) in particular, have expressed the opinion that these relations were founded on fear and that the Boni, utilizing mysterious means of pressure, used to oppress the Indians.

After seven missions spent in contact with both, we affirm that these assertions are without foundation. On the contrary, one can only admire the way in which these primitive groups have been able to create loyal and trusting relations with one another. The Indians and Boni who have worked with us have always shown themselves happy to be together. To realize this, it was sufficient to hear the animated conversations they used to have in the evening around the campfires about their respective families, the events which took place in their villages, fishing, or hunting.